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FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0437

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 8/3/2016

TAGS: PREL VT LE

SUBJECT: TFLE01: HOLY SEE ASKS USG TO PREVENT INFRASTRUCTURE DESTRUCTION IN LEBANON

REF: Vatican 160 and previous

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Sandrolini, Charge d'affaires a.i., EXEC, State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Holy See acting foreign minister called Charge d'affaires August 3 to express concern over remarks attributed to the Israeli army chief of staff in which he threatened to destroy Lebanon's infrastructure (including in Beirut). The acting FM urged the USG to prevent such destruction. The events at Qana have intensified Vatican feeling about the conflict and we expect continued pressure for an end to violence. End summary.

¶2. (C) The Holy See's acting foreign minister, Monsignor Pietro Parolin, called Charge d'affaires August 3 to express alarm over comments reportedly made by Israeli Army Chief of Staff Dan Halutz to the effect that Lebanese infrastructure could be targeted and destroyed in Beirut and elsewhere. Parolin did not have a copy of the remarks but said they had been reported by al Jazeera yesterday.

¶3. (C) Parolin urged the United States to stop the violence before Lebanon is left in ruins, and repeated pleas that the USG do whatever it can to bring about an immediate ceasefire. He thanked Charge for providing information (reftel) on the USG position, especially including expressions of regret made by the President and Secretary of State for loss of innocent life in Lebanon.

Comment

¶4. (C) Post has not seen the remarks mentioned by Parolin, though we did locate (via internet) recent reports of comments by Halutz -- including August 2 remarks that "if we have to go deeper into Lebanon, then we'll go deeper", and a Jerusalem Post article from July 24 reporting that Halutz had ordered the Israeli Defense Force to destroy ten buildings in Beirut for every Katyusha strike on Haifa; that article went on to note that the IDF Spokesman's office issued a statement of denial.

¶5. (C) The Holy See has advocated a cessation of violence since the conflict began, but since the events at Qana has intensified its efforts to lobby post. The FM or Acting FM has contacted us frequently to express alarm over the bloodshed, and a desire that the US press Israel for an immediate halt to violence. Qana took this conflict to another level for the Vatican; we would now expect this diplomatic line to continue. Vatican criticism and calls for an end to violence could intensify further if civilian casualties continue to mount. (For its part, L'Osservatore Romano, the Vatican official newspaper, printed a front-page editorial August 2 suggesting that people should not avoid photographs of bloody corpses, but should instead see and be outraged by them.) Publicly, the pope and the foreign minister have deplored the violence and called for a

ceasefire but have not mentioned the US in this context, except by implication. The Holy See has also offered its good offices to the US in communicating with Syria. Our contacts have not/not intimated that the Holy See will seek to play a more overt active role, such as an attempt to mediate directly.

SANDROLINI